



## Rosa Luxemburg on Women

Rosa Luxemburg was a major revolutionary figure in history, ranking with her contemporaries, Lenin and Gramsci, as one of the supreme pioneers of modern communist theory and practice.

Rosa Luxemburg wrote many powerful things. At least two of them have continuing currency as major, canonical “classics” of Marxism. These are “Reform or Revolution?”, and “The Mass Strike”.

There is a well-stocked archive of Rosa Luxemburg’s work,

translated into English, on the Marxists Internet Archive.

Luxemburg has been accused (by Janine Booth, for example) of being indifferent to the particular position of proletarian women under capitalism. As much as with Lenin, or perhaps even more so, it is hard (but not impossible) to isolate a selection of texts of Luxemburg and say: this is what Luxemburg wrote about women.

The attached text is a big exception to the difficulty of finding a “Luxemburg on women” text. It shows that Luxemburg was highly aware and concerned about the way that capitalist relations bore down upon women in particular.

It begins by quoting the question framed in 1889 by Emma Ihrer, the founder in 1890 of “*Die Arbeiterin*” (the woman worker) magazine: “Why are there no organizations for working women in Germany?”

“Die Arbeiterin” became “Die Gleichheit” in 1891, and the editorship passed to Clara Zetkin.

Rosa Luxemburg brings her exceptional powers of expression to bear upon the topic that she so rarely covered, and in the process leaves no doubt that she was fully aware of everything that was at stake.

The question “Why are there no organizations for working women?” is still a crucial one in South Africa now, as much as it was in the Germany of 1889 or 1912.

Luxemburg is scathing about the feminists: *“Most of those bourgeois women who act like lionesses in the struggle against “male prerogatives” would trot like docile lambs in the camp of conservative and clerical reaction if they had suffrage. Indeed, they would certainly be a good deal more reactionary than the male part of their class,”* she writes.

Luxemburg knows both the purpose, and the limits, of democracy: *“Fighting for women’s suffrage, we will also hasten the coming of the hour when the present society falls in ruins under the hammer strokes of the revolutionary proletariat,”* she concludes.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Women’s Suffrage and Class Struggle, Luxemburg, 1912.](#)
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